PATTERNS OF POWER · CASE STUDY · ARCHITECT PHASE

Before the Furniture

The Islamic State as a Founding Caught in Its Own Files — Why the Men Who Held the Guns Could Not Hold the Word, What a Manufactured Anchor Costs, and What the Case Settles That Iran Left Open

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Preface: what this study is

The collaboration, the case, and the promise that it stands alone.

This study belongs to the Patterns of Power project and is a collaboration. The questions, the direction, the case selection and the final judgement are the author's; the historical synthesis, the drafting and the scholarly retrieval were done with Claude, Anthropic's model, with every load-bearing claim checked against a source before anything was built on it.

The project asks how a distribution of holdings taken by force becomes an arrangement that armed men will defend rather than contest — how a warlord's camp becomes a country. Across three dozen cases it has found that such arrangements rest on a shared source of rightfulness that none of the men competing could have made. Almost every case in the archive is examined long after the fact, through records the surviving order produced about itself.

This one is different, and that is why it was chosen. **The Islamic State is a founding whose construction documents survive** — a folder of handwritten organisational charts and action plans drafted by the ex-Ba'athist intelligence colonel who architected the organisation, recovered after his death in 2014 and published in 2015. Foundings are ordinarily invisible: they are violent, improvised and instrumentally clear-eyed while they happen, and the orders that survive them commission, as a final deliverable, the account that there was no design. This one died young, with the scaffolding still up and the memos still in the folder.

Two earlier essays in this project used that material to establish two findings which this study now re-reads through a framework built afterwards. The first is that every durable hierarchy passes through an **architect phase**, and that the absence of architect-phase files is evidence of a successful founding rather than an organic one. The second is that the belief of the common man is **load-bearing in the engineering sense** — structure that constrains the builder — because the word recruits the army and the army audits the word's performance.

Both were written before this project had worked out the apparatus it now uses, and the apparatus changes what the case shows. It supplies a reason the colonel could not simply install himself; it identifies the precise property his manufactured ground lacked; it explains why his own recruits were the constraint that bound him; and — the

finding this study exists for — **it pairs the case with Iran to isolate a variable that neither case can isolate alone.**

That pairing is the study's spine. Two orders, the same region, overlapping decades, both claiming to speak for Islam and to rule in its name. One rests on a body of belief that accreted over a thousand years and has run for forty-seven. The other manufactured its ground inside eighteen months and lasted five years. The framework predicts that visibly manufactured grounds fail; the Iranian case has stubbornly declined to demonstrate it. **This is the case where the prediction landed**, and holding the two together shows what actually differed.

The study stands alone. No prior reading is assumed — not of this project, not of Islamic history or law, not of any scholar named.

One discipline governs, and here it governs harder than usual. The subject organised the genocide of the Yazidis, the systematic sexual enslavement of women and girls, mass executions recorded and published as propaganda, and the destruction of communities that had existed for millennia. To analyse why a project of that kind failed as a state-building exercise is not to treat it neutrally, and no reader should mistake structural language for detachment. This project states the obligation in the phrase *legibility is not pardon*, and discharges it at length in Part XIV rather than in a clause.

The question

Two claims to the same tradition, and a difference of forty-two years.

In June 2014 an organisation holding territory across eastern Syria and northern Iraq declared a caliphate, and its leader appeared in a mosque in Mosul the following month to claim the office. Within five years the territory was gone: Mosul retaken in 2017, Raqqa in 2017, the last enclave at Baghuz in March 2019.

Thirty-five years earlier and a few hundred miles east, a clerical class had taken a state and installed a doctrine of clerical rule. That order has now run forty-seven years, survived a war that killed hundreds of thousands, two leadership deaths, decades of sanctions, repeated mass protest, and a campaign of foreign decapitation strikes.

Both claimed to rule in the name of Islam. Both installed sharia courts, a religious police and an appointed clergy. Both were built by men with military and security expertise. One is a state and one is a memory.

The obvious explanations do not survive contact. It is not that one was more brutal — the Iranian order has executed thousands and shot hundreds of its own citizens in the street. It is not that one had more enemies; both faced coalitions of great powers. It is not that one had oil, though that matters and Part X takes it seriously. And it is certainly not that one was more sincere, because sincerity is not observable and this project does not attempt to sort interiors.

The framework's answer is structural and it can be stated before the evidence: **one of them was standing on a ground that had accreted for a thousand years out of the sincere religious life of people who were not playing this game, and the other tried to make one in eighteen months.**

Both are cases of armed men capturing an interpretive apparatus. The difference is **what there was to capture** — and this study is an account of what happens when there is nothing lying around and the builders have to mint.

The framework, compressed

Possession, ownership, the anchor, the interpreter, the floor.

Everything below rests on a distinction ordinary speech collapses.

Possession is what force holds now; it is present-tense and expires when the capacity sustaining it expires. **Ownership** is a claim about the future and about other people — that this will be mine tomorrow while I sleep, and that when I die you will treat my son as its holder. Ownership is not a relation between a person and a thing; it is a structure of expectations about how other people will behave across time. Force is sovereign over the first and impotent over the second, so **the part of a holding that force cannot reach must be manufactured out of something that is not force.**

The coordination failure. Everyone in a world of armed men would prefer a settlement, and that explains nothing, because the question is why one holds when breaking it would pay. The decisive calculation is the **bystanders'**: each asks whether a seizure is his quarrel, and absent a common ground of title the answer is no — intervening buys casualties and an enemy, and intervening alone makes him the next target. So everyone waits, each knowing the others reason identically. **Warlordism is a coordination failure among the men who might have punished it, not a moral failure.**

The anchor. Give every holding a common source and the arithmetic inverts: an attack on any title becomes an attack on the ground beneath all of them, and a coalition forms that nobody has to lead. That source works on expectations rather than on wills — a man abstains not because he believes but because he can count.

From which the condition that organises this study: **a party competing for the spoils cannot be the author of who gets them**, because a title granted by a competitor is a forecast about that competitor's health. So the source must be **unforgeable by the current claimants**. A working anchor must also be **determinate**, **common knowledge** — meaning not just that everyone knows it but that everyone knows the others know it — and **attached to an office rather than a man**.

Where such material comes from. The property required — *no current claimant made this* — is a fact about history rather than a feature of a design, and facts about history cannot be added later. A ruler can build the temple, endow the priesthood and stage the ceremony; he cannot make it true that he did not. So the material must come from before the players existed and must have been made for something else. Biology

calls the pattern **exaptation**: feathers long predate flight and appear to have served insulation and display — flight did not cause feathers, flight found them. From which: **sincerity is the manufacturing process, and cynicism is parasitic on it.** An instrumental elite can capture a stock of belief and live off it for centuries; it cannot make one, because making one requires not being about power.

The interpreter. An anchor does not read itself. Somebody says what it requires, and that class exists structurally, because specialisation divides knowing as well as labour. It does **two separable jobs**: the *vertical* job of telling the apex no, which requires that the apex cannot revoke his standing; and the *horizontal* job of making every powerful man's title checkable against one source, which requires only that he be **singular**. The measurable variable is **where the credential is issued** — *fused*, where the claimant is his own interpreter; *domestic*, where the ruler appoints, examines or funds; *foreign*, where it comes from outside every claimant's reach.

The floor. The coercive capacity that makes verdicts land — and not bedrock. An army is a set of armed men each of whom could refuse, so it has the same coordination problem one scale down, with its own anchor. What matters is **what its obedience is addressed to**: a man, an office, or a ground. A force addressed to a ground is the most stable and the only one that constrains the ruler, because a soldier who obeys the ground can be told by the ground to stop obeying the ruler.

And two instruments this study uses. The **hostile-witness test**: did the order's enemies, at the time, attack the source of title as an *innovation*? Enemies have every incentive to say so if it is true and to attack on other grounds if it is not. And the **fidelity variable**: compliance runs on the strength of a ground multiplied by the perceived fidelity of the men occupying it, and those move independently — so an order can face a legitimacy collapse with the underlying belief entirely intact.

Part I — The architect phase, and why we almost never see one

Foundings are invisible because successful ones delete their own files.

Every order in this project's archive presents itself, in its own records, as grown rather than built: immemorial, ordained, its kings descended from gods and its laws received rather than drafted.

That presentation is not exactly a lie. It is a **survivorship effect**. Foundings are violent, improvised and instrumentally clear-eyed while they happen. Then the founders die, the schools they specified do their work, the hagiography commissioned as propaganda becomes the only surviving account, and the third generation sincerely cannot imagine that the edifice was ever scaffolding.

This project's word for what happens in between is **formation**, and the crucial point is that it operates on the elite as well as on the ruled. The architects' own grandchildren are raised inside the word the architects fitted. **The architects build the room; formation makes it furniture.** And furniture governs the inheritors as firmly as it governs anybody, which is why mature orders are simultaneously so stable and so blind.

An earlier essay in this project drew from this a distinction which the present study relies on and which is worth restating in its corrected form. **Architect and inheritor are modes, not generations.** The architect mode is the *instrumental* relation to the word: the operator who knows the belief is a component, selects it, fits it, budgets for its clergy, and can read his own structure from outside. The inheritor mode is the *formed* relation: the operator who received the word as furniture, installed in childhood prior to evaluation, and who governs inside it sincerely, maintaining what he cannot see as built.

Most rulers in the record hold power in the inheritor mode; that is what dynasties are for. But inheritance does not foreclose architecture — an inheritor can step into the architect mode, grasp a piece of the structure as structure, and redesign it. And the modes can nest inside a single performance: Augustus is the most complete architect in the ancient record, and his design's central specification was that it must appear to be an inheritance — the republic restored, the old forms kept, the revolution dressed as furniture from the first day.

Which yields the discipline this study applies to all ancient history: the absence of architect-phase files is not evidence of an organic founding. It is evidence of a successful one.

And it explains why the Islamic State is worth a study despite being a failure and despite being contemporary. It died in the architect phase. The scaffolding is still up. **The folder is the fossil bed of foundings — the soft parts, preserved.**

The folder

The documents were drafted by **Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khlifawi**, known as **Haji Bakr**, a colonel in the intelligence service of Saddam Hussein's air defence force who had, by the account of those who traced his life, nothing to do with religion before 2003. He was killed in a firefight at Tell Rifaat in northern Syria in January 2014; the papers were recovered and smuggled out, and were published by the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* in April 2015.

What they contain is not theology. They are handwritten organisational charts, lists and action plans: informant networks, infiltration schedules, meticulous studies of local tribal power structures, and a sequence for converting communities into police states. Around Haji Bakr in the leadership stood a stratum of the same formation — ex-officers of the dissolved Iraqi army and intelligence services, many of whom had been networked in American detention.

They were building with the only craft they had, which was the craft of the surveillance state. And they were building something they wanted to be permanent.

Which makes them, for this project's purposes, a group of displaced professionals of coordination and command, holding territory by force, facing exactly the question this project exists to answer: how does a body that holds ground by force convert possession into ownership?

Part II — Violence first, and the formation curve

Why the floor is poured before the word, in every case, without exception.

The architect phase has an order, and the case runs it in textbook sequence: the military conquests of 2014; the massacres that advertised the floor's reality; the security apparatus before the sharia courts; the courts before the schools.

That order is not a choice, and the framework can say why.

There is no way to govern a first generation except by coercion. The word has had no time to work. Formation operates on children and therefore needs a childhood. The only believers available at year one are the conquerors' own. So force carries everything in the first year, and belief carries more with each formed cohort, until a mature order rests on a floor it almost never has to show.

This project's deep cases ran the identical sequence at slower speed. The armies of 711 preceded the paperwork of the *dhimma*. The Norman lances preceded the legal settlement at Melfi by a generation. In every case the load shifted along the same curve.

The architect phase is the steep, expensive, violent end of that curve. No order in the files skipped it — and the ones that appear to have skipped it are the ones whose year one is undocumented.

Which gives a first reading of the case that is not about its wickedness but about its position on the curve. **The Islamic State never got off the steep end.** Five years is not enough for a single formed cohort to reach adulthood. Every subject it governed had been formed by somebody else, in some other word — and the schools it specified, which were the instrument that would have changed that, were built for a generation the state did not live to raise.

An order at that point on the curve has one thing holding it: force. And the framework's measure of a settlement is *cheapness*. By that measure the Islamic State never had a settlement at all. It had a conquest with an administration attached.

Part III — The procurement decision

Why architects shop rather than mint, and what minting actually costs.

Having poured a floor, the architect faces a decision the earlier essay stated as a law, and the framework can now supply its mechanism.

> ***It is always cheaper to retrofit an existing belief than to mint a new one, because the slow ingredient is a formed population.***

A floor can be poured in a campaigning season. A formed population cannot be manufactured in less than a generation. So an architect who commissions a new word from scratch is signing up for decades of coercion while his first formed cohorts grow — against believers of the old words, who are formed already.

The framework adds the deeper reason, which is not about speed at all. **A new word cannot have the property that makes a word usable.** The requirement is that no current claimant made it, and a word the architect commissioned was made by the architect, and every witness to the commissioning retains the observation that destroys it. Time is not merely expensive here; it is *constitutive*. What the architect is short of is not years of coercion but **years of not having been there.**

So architects shop the standing inventory, and the case shows the shopping being done. The population of the conquest zone was Muslim already; the formation was installed; the grievances of Sunni Iraq were standing fuel. The design therefore specified sharia sheikhs and a caliphate rather than a Ba'athist restoration that nobody believed in — **builders of a new state reaching, as builders always reach, for the load-bearing material already on site.**

Constantine reached the same way, retrofitting an empire whose official word was visibly failing with the fastest-forming belief inside it rather than a court invention. The popes at Melfi sold, and the Normans bought, a word with six formed centuries behind it. And the rare architects who did mint substantially new words paid the predicted invoice: Ibn Tumart, fitting a genuinely novel doctrine over the Atlas tribes in the twelfth century, installed it through the *tamyiz* — a purge of his own followers by the thousand — because **a word without formed believers must be enforced on exactly the people it cannot yet hold.**

And here is where the case diverges from its own procurement decision

The Islamic State's architects made the correct procurement decision and then, in the crucial particular, could not execute it.

They shopped for Islam, which was on site and formed. What they could not shop for was **the specific claim they needed**, which was that this organisation and this man held the office. Islam was lying around. *A caliphate held by these people* was not, and could not be, because it did not exist until they said it did.

Which is the distinction the framework insists on and which the procurement law obscures if stated loosely. **Retrofitting is not the same as authorisation.** You can borrow a formed population's cosmology to make your rule legible to them — and you still have to answer the question of why *you* rule under it, and that answer has to come from somewhere you cannot reach.

Part IV is what happened when they reached for it.

Part IV — What the colonel could not do

A prohibition written into Islamic constitutional law, and obeyed by men who could not have stated it.

Watch what the architects' own files show them doing, because it is not what a naive theory of manipulation predicts.

The colonel's documents budget, in his own hand, for the manufacture of a religious face: appoint the smartest as sharia sheikhs, train them, dispatch them, marry the brothers into influential families. A secular intelligence officer, holding an army recruited by a word he did not hold, **found himself obeying the word's specifications.** The public face had to be clerical. The courts had to be sharia courts. The punishments had to be the punishments.

And at the top, the office the word offered was the caliphate — and the classical law of the caliphate has job requirements.

The Qurayshi clause

One of those requirements, in the mainstream Sunni juristic tradition, is **descent from the Quraysh**, the Prophet's tribe.

Haji Bakr could not become Qurayshi. Neither could any of his colonels. No amount of territory, weapons, money or organisational genius confers a genealogy — which is why the man produced for the pulpit at Mosul was not an intelligence officer but a doctor of Islamic studies whose lineage was proclaimed Qurayshi.

That is the framework's central prohibition operating on men who had every incentive to ignore it and could not. A party competing for the spoils cannot be the author of who gets them. A colonel who declared himself Commander of the Faithful would have produced a title worth exactly a colonel's current strength, in front of an army recruited by a word that specifies otherwise. So they went and found a claim none of them could have made.

The identical move appears in this project's archive across a thousand years and four civilisations. Timur could conquer from Delhi to Ankara and could not make himself a descendant of Genghis Khan, so he married a Chinggisid princess, took the subordinate title of royal son-in-law, and ruled through puppet khans he could have removed in an afternoon. The Umayyads of Córdoba reached for the same clause of

the same word in 929. And in March 2026, generals of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard — who could have taken the office and did not — pressed an Assembly into installing the previous Leader's son, because **descent is the one thing conquest cannot confer** and therefore the one claim none of them could be accused of having made.

Four cases, no contact, one behaviour. **The men with the guns keep reaching for a warrant they cannot forge, and they do it without being able to state why.**

The clause they could not satisfy

But the caliphal office has a second requirement, and this one is fatal, and it is the most remarkable thing in the whole case.

When 126 Muslim scholars addressed an open letter to the claimant in September 2014, their point-by-point rebuttal included this: **it is forbidden in Islam to declare a caliphate without consensus from all Muslims.**

Read that as a structural specification rather than as a doctrinal point. The classical law of the caliphate contains, as a positive legal requirement, **the framework's own prohibition**: a caliph cannot confer the office on himself, because the office requires the recognition of the community — the *bay'a* of the scholars and the consensus of the Muslims. **The anchor is designed so that a claimant cannot author his own title.**

Which means the Islamic State attempted to forge the one kind of claim whose defining property is that it cannot be self-conferred. They could produce a man with a plausible genealogy. They could not produce the recognition, because recognition is by construction issued by other people, and those other people were the entire Sunni scholarly establishment of the world.

Haji Bakr's design was correct in every particular a security professional can control and failed at the one point no security professional can reach. He could appoint sheikhs; he could not appoint the community that would have had to accept them.

Part V — A credential at zero distance

The purest domestic position in the archive, because the class was not captured but built.

The framework's measurable variable is where the interpreter's qualification is issued, and the Islamic State occupies a position no other case in the archive reaches.

Fused is where the claimant is his own interpreter — the Maya *ajaw* who held, permanently and by title, the office of Keeper of the Holy Books; the Hawaiian chief whose mana was in his own body; the Türk khagan who read heaven's favour off his own victories.

Domestic is where a separate interpretive class exists and the ruler appoints, examines, licenses or funds it — the Ottoman *şeyhülislam* appointed and dismissed by the sultan; the Chinese examination system in which the state set the syllabus and the pass list.

The Islamic State is domestic in a form the category was not built to describe, because **the class did not pre-exist the appointment.** The Ottomans captured an interpretive establishment that had existed for centuries and had its own traditions, its own transmission chains and its own internal standards. The colonel's files describe *selecting the smartest available men and training them into sheikhs*.

That is not capture. It is **manufacture of the interpreter class itself**, which places the credential at zero distance from the sword, and the framework's predictions for the domestic position apply at maximum strength:

Restraint: none, and none possible. A sharia court staffed by men the security service selected, trained and dispatched cannot tell the security service no. Not because the men were insincere — the earlier essay's finding on this stands and is important — but because a refusal that ends the refuser's appointment and his life will be made occasionally by heroic individuals and can never become an institutional capacity. There is no independent standing to refuse *from*.

Coordination: the horizontal function did work, and this deserves saying, because it is the only part of the design that performed. Within the territory, title genuinely did derive from one source. The courts, the *hisba*, the appointed sheikhs, the marriage of cadres into influential families, the land registers — all of it made holdings checkable against a single authority. Which is why the organisation could govern at all, could tax, could adjudicate, and could hold a territory the size of a small country for

three years with a coherent administrative structure. **The horizontal function requires only that the interpreter be singular, not that he be independent** — and singular is exactly what a manufactured class is.

Repair: none. There was no corporate body with procedural standing distinct from any occupant — no council, no synod, no seminary with its own credential and its own centuries. Which means a fork could not have been mended, and the framework's finding that a fork in such an order is unrepairable in principle applies. The subsequent history of jihadist factionalism, in which every split produces a new claimant and no mechanism produces a reconciliation, is that finding running in the field.

And the deeper cost, which is not about restraint

There is a further consequence of zero distance, and it is the one that decided the case.

A manufactured interpreter class cannot supply what an interpreter class is for. Its whole function is to say that a distribution is rightful — and it can only say that credibly if the standing from which it speaks was not conferred by the party benefiting from the verdict. A sheikh appointed by the men whose rule he is certifying is, structurally, the men certifying themselves with an extra signature on the document.

Which is the same failure as Akbar's *maḥẓar* of 1579, and it is worth naming the identity because it is exact. Akbar could not issue a decree establishing his own authority, so he obtained an attestation in which *other men* declared that his judgement bound them — and the framework reads that as a confession, because the most powerful man in South Asia needed somebody else's handwriting. **The Islamic State's appointed sheikhs are the same instrument at organisational scale: other men's handwriting, on paper the signatories were given by the beneficiary.**

Part VI — The hostile-witness test, run live

Enemies said it was new, at the time, in the tradition's own vocabulary.

The framework's test for distinguishing a found ground from a manufactured one is whether the order's enemies attacked the source of title as an **innovation**. The logic is that rivals have every incentive to say *he invented this last year* if he did, and every incentive to attack on some other ground if he did not.

This project has run the test on several cases. Akbar's document is known almost entirely through a hostile chronicler at his own court who made religious *innovation* his central charge. Henry VIII's Supreme Headship was attacked as novelty and men were executed over exactly that question in 1535. Diocletian's sacralisation was recognised as new at the time. Against those, the Seljuk emirs disputed many things and never disputed that the caliphate was ancient; William of Normandy's opponents argued about whether Edward had promised him the throne, which is arguing *inside* the ground.

The Islamic State returns the most complete negative result the test has produced anywhere, and it returns it faster than any other case.

The declaration was made in June 2014. By **19 September 2014 — under three months later — one hundred and twenty-six Muslim scholars had signed a point-by-point rebuttal** running to seventeen pages and twenty-four points, arguing almost entirely on Islamic grounds from Quran, prophetic tradition and classical jurisprudence, with signatories from Al-Azhar and the International Union of Muslim Scholars among others. Its charges included that a caliphate cannot be declared without consensus, that the claimant lacked the qualifications to issue binding rulings, and that the practices being carried out contravened explicit prohibitions.

And the rejection was not confined to establishment scholars. The organisation's own parent movement repudiated the claim; jihadist scholars outside it disputed it; and the wider Sunni scholarly world, across schools and countries and political alignments that agree on almost nothing, agreed on this.

By the framework's test, that is manufacture, identified as manufacture, at the time, by the people best placed to know — and the verdict arrived within a hundred days.

One honest qualification

The instrument should not be credited with more than it did. The letter is reported to have sparked little public debate in the Muslim world, and there is a substantial critical literature arguing that it was theologically uneven and that it did not represent the range of Islamic scholarship it claimed to. Some critics hold that it was aimed at Western audiences as much as at the organisation's recruits.

That criticism does not damage the test, and it is worth being precise about why. **The test does not measure the letter's persuasive effect. It measures what the enemies said**, and it uses their testimony as evidence about the ground rather than as an intervention in the argument. A hundred and twenty-six scholars publicly refusing to supply the recognition that the caliphal office requires is evidence that the recognition was not there — whatever anyone did about it afterwards.

Part VII — The audit: fidelity at generation zero

The recruits brought a faculty with them, and turned it on their new leaders.

Here the earlier essay's finding meets the framework's newest variable, and they turn out to be the same thing observed from two directions.

The word recruits the army

A legitimating language does not fly over interchangeable troops. **It recruits exactly the coalition that believes it and repels the coalition that believes its rival.** That is why the Islamic State's foreign contingent came — not for a Ba'athist restoration, which nobody would have crossed a border for, but for a caliphate.

And it recruited a particular kind of person. The earlier essay's account is that the most intense recruits to any framework are produced by **disillusionment at asymmetry**: a person formed inside one word collides with the visible gap between that word and the conduct of the elites administering it, takes the gap as the scandal his formation taught him it was, and falls into a rival framework promising the accounting his first one defaulted on. The Westerner who abandoned a liberal formation for the Islamic State believed — totally, expensively, with his travel documents and his life. That is what made him worth recruiting: the believer fights cheap, marches far, polices himself, and dies forward. **No paymaster can purchase what the word recruits for free.**

But note precisely what the recruiter acquired. He acquired soldiers whose loyalty attaches **to the word, not to him** — he holds them only in his capacity as the word's visible performer. And he acquired, in the convert specifically, men pre-selected for the one faculty that delivered them: **asymmetry detection**. The recruit came because he could see the gap between a word and its administrators' conduct. He did not lose the faculty by arriving. He brought it inside, and aimed it at his new leaders.

What the defectors said

The defector literature is the audit's record, and its findings are uniform. A study of fifty-eight publicly documented defectors, published in 2015, found the same

narratives recurring: that life under the organisation was excessively harsh; that emirs were **corrupt**; that it committed atrocities against fellow Sunni Muslims; that it was more interested in fighting other Sunnis than the Assad government; and — the formulation the framework cares about — that it was **un-Islamic**.

Read that last word carefully. **The defectors did not, in the main, report that they had stopped believing.** They reported that the organisation did not represent what they believed. And a portion left not toward home but sideways, toward groups they judged truer to the cause.

> ***The radical's audit, failed, does not produce an ex-radical. It produces a transfer.***

Which is the fidelity variable, at generation zero

The framework has recently split its mass-side question into two terms: compliance runs on the **strength of the ground** multiplied by the **perceived fidelity of the men occupying it**, and the two move independently — so an order can face a legitimacy collapse with the underlying belief entirely intact.

The defector interviews are that split, observed directly, in the subjects' own words, at the founding. **Term one held: they were still Muslims and still believed the caliphal ideal. Term two collapsed: they concluded these men were not it.**

And the case shows the collapse happening **immediately**, which the Iranian case does not, and the difference is instructive. In Iran the fidelity failures are datable public events — a qualification lowered in 1989, an office passed to a son in 2026 — separated by decades, with formed generations in between to absorb them. The Islamic State had no formed generation and no buffer. **Its audit ran continuously from year one, conducted by exactly the people it most needed, and it had no stock of accumulated goodwill to spend against the findings.**

The conduct-sensitive trap, at maximum speed

And the ground it had chosen made this worse in a specific and predictable way.

The framework distinguishes **conduct-sensitive** anchors, which specify the character of the rightful ruler, from **conduct-insensitive** ones, which do not. Descent says nothing about behaviour; a lottery says nothing; a procedure says nothing. But a caliphate justified entirely by the claim that it applies God's law correctly is **maximally conduct-sensitive** — its whole warrant is a claim about conduct.

For such an order, **coercion is self-refuting.** A secular tyrant who brutalises is doing what tyrants do, and the act is consistent with his claim, which is only that he holds power. An organisation claiming to be the rightly-guided caliphate, brutalising Sunni Muslims, is **producing evidence against its own claim, in public, in the terms its own claim specifies** — and producing it in front of an audience recruited for asymmetry detection.

The loop has no exit: thin fidelity requires more force; force applied by a conduct-sensitive claimant fails the test its own ground sets; the failure thins fidelity further. In Iran that loop has been running for a decade with the brakes of a formed population and an ancient ground. **Here it ran with no brakes at all**, and the defector record is the read-out.

Part VIII — A floor addressed to the ground

The guard theorem, inverted — and the constraint that bound the colonels.

This project's most recent theoretical finding concerns armies, and the Islamic State is its mirror image.

The finding: a floor is not bedrock but a second settlement, and what matters about it is **what its obedience is addressed to** — a man, an office, or a ground. Rulers throughout the record have therefore reached for a force **recruited from people the existing order does not command**: foreigners, slaves, converts, children taken young, men with nowhere else to stand. Alexander's thirty thousand Persian youths. The Ottoman *devşirme* boys, forbidden marriage, property and trade expressly so they should leave no descendants. The Mamluks, bought as children. The Praetorians, paid by the emperor.

What is purchased is not courage but **the absence of an alternative address**, and it works, which is the trouble. A guard whose standing was deliberately drawn from nowhere is outside the coalition that punishes seizures, so when it moves nothing assembles against it. **A guard that the anchor cannot turn against you is a guard the anchor cannot turn back**: the Praetorians auctioned the empire, the Mamluks became the sultanate, the Janissaries killed the sultan who tried to reform them.

The Islamic State ran that logic backwards, and got the opposite constraint.

Its floor was not recruited to have no address. It was recruited **by the word**, and its address was the ground itself. Which is precisely why it was cheap, mobile, self-policing and willing to die — and precisely why it could not be commanded against the ground.

Watch what that does to a colonel. He holds an army whose loyalty attaches to a word he does not hold, and he holds them only in his capacity as that word's visible performer. He cannot openly overrule the clerics he manufactured, because the army's believers are watching. He cannot install himself as caliph, because the office has requirements he does not meet and the army knows the requirements. **He cannot dispense with the word at all, because the word is what produced the army**; and a blessing has no battalions, so the manufactured caliph cannot dispense with the colonels either.

So from day one the order contained **two elites, unified in the founding and divided by trade** — one holding the violence and needing the blessing, one holding the blessing and owning no division — and neither able to absorb the other.

> ***The tension between floor and word is not a corruption that creeps into mature orders. It is poured at the foundation, by the procurement decision itself.***

And this is the answer to a question the framework has been asked and had not answered: what determines which side wins that tension over time?

Two variables, and the case makes both visible. The first is **credential distance** — an interpreter class the apex appointed cannot constrain him, and one credentialled outside his reach can. The Iranian clergy had a credential no shah could issue for four centuries and used it to break a shah; the Islamic State's sheikhs were selected and trained by the men they certified, and constrained nobody.

The second is what happens if the interpreters acquire **their own military capacity** — the speculation is natural and the framework's answer is counter-intuitive. **It destroys them.** A source of title that acquires a floor becomes a competitor, and a competitor's word is worth his army. The Abbasid caliphate was militarily powerless for centuries and was sought out for investiture by Turkish sultans who could have crushed it — and was destroyed within seventeen years of the single occasion on which it raised an army of its own. **Powerlessness is not the puzzle. It is the qualification.** A clergy that arms itself does not become a stronger interpreter; it stops being an interpreter and becomes one more claimant, and the ground it was standing on becomes worth exactly its battalions.

Part IX — Surveillance before belief

The sequence in the files, read as an admission.

One further reading of the folder, using the instrument this project developed most recently.

On the armed side, expenditure is evidence *for* an anchor: **force never pays for what it does not need**, so Timur's Chinggisid marriage and the Seljuks' investiture from a powerless caliph prove the claims were load-bearing.

On the mass side the sign inverts. **Surveillance is what a ruler buys instead of the thing he could not obtain, and its scale is a direct read on how much of that thing is missing.** A believed subject keeps his own account and polices himself for nothing; everything spent watching him is the gap.

Now look at the sequence in Haji Bakr's plans. **The informant networks come first** — before the land, before the courts, before the schools. Local men recruited to report on families, on marriages, on who prays where and who says what; the tribal power structures mapped in advance to identify where leverage sits.

The framework reads that sequence as an admission written by the party best placed to make it. **An order that builds its surveillance apparatus before it builds its clergy has told you it knows it has no formed cohort and will not have one for twenty years.** It is not a failure of the design. It is the design correctly costing the position on the formation curve — force carries everything at year one — and the size of the surveillance line item is the size of the missing belief.

Which produces a diagnostic that generalises beyond this case: **compare the order in which a founding builds its instruments.** An order retrofitting a formed population can build courts before informants, because the population already holds the word and the courts are simply where the word is applied. An order that must hold a population it has not formed builds informants first, because there is nothing else holding anybody.

And it gives a way of reading the colonial material this project has already worked. The *kipande* — the numbered copper container worn by law at the throat of every adult African male in colonial Kenya from 1919, holding his description and his employers' remarks on his conduct — is the same object at a different scale: a **portable file**, the externalised memory an order carries because it cannot trust a man to hold

himself in place by his own conviction. Kenya's colonial administration and the colonel's informant network are two implementations of one purchase.

Part X — The pair, and what it isolates

Two orders, one variable, and the prediction that finally landed.

The framework holds that **visibly manufactured grounds fail**. Diocletian's sacralisation outlived his abdication by nothing. Henry VIII's Supreme Headship was demoted by his own daughter within a generation. Akbar's attestation died with him.

And this project's Iran study has had to record, twice, that the prediction had not landed there: *velayat-e faqih* was assembled by a named man in the 1970s, attacked at the time as an innovation by the pre-eminent jurists of its own tradition, and has organised a state for forty-seven years.

The Islamic State is where the prediction landed, and holding the two cases together isolates the variable.

Set out what they share, because it is a great deal. Both are twentieth- and twenty-first-century orders in the same region. Both claimed to rule in the name of Islam and installed sharia courts, religious police and an appointed clergy. Both were designed in significant part by men with military and security expertise. Both faced the hostile-witness test and failed it — Khomeini's doctrine was rejected by nearly every senior jurist of his tradition, including the pre-eminent figure at Najaf; the caliphal claim was rejected by a hundred and twenty-six scholars in ninety days. Both ran conduct-sensitive anchors. Both faced great-power coalitions.

Now the differences, in the order the framework ranks them.

One: what there was to capture. Iran's clerical class had existed for centuries with a qualification no ruler could issue — a *marja'* is made by peer reputation and by the voluntary following of ordinary believers, funded by religious dues paid directly to him with no state in the circuit, and often resident in another country. That class was **captured**, and it brought with it a thousand years of accumulated authorlessness. The Islamic State's sheikhs were **selected and trained by the men they certified**. One order inherited a stock; the other tried to mint.

Two: elapsed time on the ground. Twelver Shi'ism was imposed on Iran by a warlord in 1501 and had four and a half centuries to become the furniture of reality before anyone in 1979 was born. The caliphal claim of 2014 was five years old when the territory fell — and the framework's finding on this is that **elapsed time is a**

component of an anchor rather than a description of it, because the men an anchor must coordinate cannot be coordinated by a claim they watched being made.

Three: the formation curve. Iran has raised two full generations inside its own schools, calendar and conscription. The Islamic State raised none. Every subject it governed had been formed by somebody else.

And four, which is a genuine confound and must be conceded: revenue. Iran is a rentier state — its revenue is attached to the ground rather than to popular consent, so the mass audience does not have to be bought. The Islamic State's revenue came from oil sales, taxation, extortion and plunder in a contested war zone, all of which required continuous administrative and military effort and all of which were attackable. **A framework claiming that belief explains the difference must reckon with the fact that one of these orders had a durable point-resource and the other did not.** Part XIII treats this as the study's most serious weakness.

What the pair supports

With that conceded, the pairing does isolate something the cases cannot show separately.

> ***The failure mode of a manufactured ground is not that people disbelieve the cosmology. It is that the cosmology cannot be made to authorise these particular men.***

Nobody in the Islamic State's territory stopped being Muslim. The defectors did not report losing their faith; they reported that the organisation was un-Islamic. Nobody in Iran has stopped being Shi'a; the protest movements have not proposed an alternative cosmology. **In both cases term one held and term two failed** — and the difference between forty-seven years and five is not a difference in the belief but in **how much accumulated authorlessness the order had to spend against its own fidelity failures.**

Iran inherited a stock and has been drawing it down for two generations. The Islamic State had none, and paid cash for everything from the first day.

Part XI — The counterfactual, and the completed experiment

What three hundred years would have done, and one empire where we can check.

Run the thought experiment the earlier essay proposed, because the framework now makes its stages precise.

Suppose the state had survived three centuries. The conquest generation dies. The schools do their work, and the second and third cohorts are formed believers of the order's own rite, for whom the order is not a project but the weather. The hagiography commissioned in the architect phase as propaganda becomes the only surviving account: the founding retold as restoration, the conquests as deliverance ordained, the first caliph as a saint discovered rather than a front-man produced. **The colonels are deleted** — not by conspiracy but by the ordinary operation of archives that serve the word, since no formed historian of the mature order could write, or believe, or find the documents to suspect, that the founding sharia courts were staffed to a security service's organisational chart.

And the manufactured clerics, had the state lived, would have buried the colonels' successors under rulings — sincerely, their own formation by then complete — and the violence apex's grandsons would have needed their blessing for every war.

This would be speculation, except that the experiment has a control, and it is one of the most valuable documents in this project's archive.

The Sassanid empire preserves both halves of the operation. From the architect phase survive the rock inscriptions of **Kartir**, a priest who served four kings of the new dynasty across the third century — the only commoner in the empire's history granted inscriptions of his own — who used them to narrate, in the first person, king by king and promotion by promotion, his construction of the Zoroastrian state church: the fire temples founded, the orthodoxy codified, the priesthood organised under his offices, the rival faiths struck down, the prophet Mani delivered to prison and death.

It is the colonel's folder in stone: an interpreter class being built, by a named builder, on commission from a violence apex that had just conquered its floor and was fitting a word over it from the materials at hand — Zoroastrianism being the standing formation of the Iranian plateau, retrofitted by a new dynasty of provincial upstarts exactly as the procurement law predicts.

And from three centuries later survives the other half: the **Letter of Tansar**, a sixth-century court production dressed as a third-century document, in which the founding is retold precisely as the thought experiment requires — the previous dynasty as corrupt and heretical, the founder as the restorer of an eternal faith to its firm foundation, and the constructed church-state declared a fact of nature in a formula the mature order carved into its self-understanding: that church and state were born of one womb. **Never built, never fitted, never commissioned: born.**

The architect's memos and the inheritors' hagiography, from one empire, three centuries apart, with both documents on the table.

Which is the discipline the case teaches for all ancient history, and the reason a five-year failure earns a place in an archive of millennia. **Accretion is what architecture looks like after the scaffolding is burned. The ordained is the engineered, plus three formed generations.**

Part XII — Predictions

Stated so that they can fail.

P1 — Foundings build informants before clergy, and the ratio tracks the formation deficit. Orders governing a population they did not form should build surveillance apparatus before interpretive apparatus; orders retrofitting an already-formed population should be able to build courts first. *Falsified if* founding sequences show no relationship to whether the subject population was already formed in the word being used.

P2 — Architects shop rather than mint, and minting carries a purge. Founders should overwhelmingly retrofit a belief already held by the conquered population; the rare cases that install a substantially new word should show heavy coercion directed at the founder's *own* followers, because a word without formed believers must be enforced on the people it cannot yet hold. *Falsified if* newly-minted words are commonly installed without internal purges and hold within a generation.

P3 — The apex cannot credential its own interpreters and knows it. Architects should be observed recruiting or manufacturing a class with the marks of genuine credentialling — training, lineage, recognisable qualification — rather than simply having their own officers perform the role, even where the officers are available and more reliable. *Falsified if* founding regimes commonly staff their religious or legal apparatus openly with their own security personnel and are accepted.

P4 — Unforgeable qualifications dictate terms to whoever operates the word. Where an anchor specifies a qualification no claimant can acquire — descent, ordination, recognition by a body — the operators should be observed producing somebody who satisfies it rather than dispensing with it, however inconvenient. *Falsified if* armed founders routinely discard such clauses and are accepted anyway.

P5 — Recognition requirements are the fatal clause. Anchors requiring the assent of a body outside the claimants should defeat manufacture more reliably than anchors requiring only a personal attribute, because a genealogy can be asserted and a consensus cannot. *Falsified if* manufactured claims succeed at similar rates against recognition-requiring and attribute-requiring anchors.

P6 — The audit runs hardest where the recruits are converts. Orders recruited by a word rather than by pay or conscription should show defection driven by leadership conduct rather than by military reverses or doctrinal doubt, and defectors

should transfer laterally to rival groups within the same framework rather than exiting the framework. *Falsified if* such defections track battlefield fortune, or if defectors typically abandon the belief.

P7 — Conduct-sensitive anchors accelerate the coercion loop, and the acceleration is inversely proportional to formed cohorts. Orders whose ground specifies the ruler's character should lose fidelity faster the fewer formed generations they have to absorb the failures. *Falsified if* conduct-sensitive orders with no formed population sustain heavy coercion without measurable fidelity loss.

P8 — Interpreters who arm themselves cease to be interpreters. Interpretive institutions that acquire independent military capacity should lose the capacity to author title and become ordinary claimants — and should be destroyed or absorbed at markedly higher rates than institutions that remain militarily powerless. *Falsified if* armed interpretive classes prove better at constraining rulers than unarmed ones.

And the account fails as a whole if this is found: a founding that manufactured its own interpretive class from scratch, over the recorded objection of the surrounding scholarly establishment of the tradition it claimed, and produced a durable, cheaply-governed order within a single generation — or a manufactured ground that survived a founder's death and was still authorising titles three generations later without ever having been presented as a recovery.

Part XIII — Where this is weak

Nine problems, three of them serious.

The revenue confound may be doing the work the framework attributes to belief. Iran holds a durable point-resource whose revenue is attached to territory rather than to popular consent; the Islamic State held contested oilfields, extortion rackets and plunder in an active war zone under aerial attack. That difference could account for the entire disparity in survival with no reference to anchors at all. **This is the study's most serious weakness and it is not resolved.** The best that can be said is that revenue explains capacity and not the *shape* of the failure — the defector testimony describes a fidelity collapse in the defectors' own words, and no account of oil prices predicts that people leave saying an organisation is un-Islamic.

The case was destroyed from outside. This project's own discipline excludes conquest as evidence about a settlement, on the ground that a demolished building tells you nothing about its foundations. The Islamic State was destroyed by a great-power coalition with overwhelming air superiority, and a strict application of the rule would remove the case from evidence entirely. The partial defence is that the fidelity collapse documented in the defector literature **precedes and is independent of** the territorial collapse — but the two are entangled, and a critic could reasonably say the case proves nothing about anchors.

The files are a small and non-random sample. One folder, from one architect, recovered by rebels and published by a magazine. Whether it was representative of the organisation's planning, whether it was current at the time of his death, and how much of what it specified was actually executed are all open. Journalistic reconstruction of a clandestine organisation from captured documents is difficult, contested, and has been challenged.

The defector literature is self-selected. People who leave and speak publicly are not a random sample of people who joined, and their accounts are given in circumstances — asylum claims, prosecutions, media interviews — that reward particular narratives. That defectors say they left over leadership conduct is exactly what someone in their position has an interest in saying.

Five years is not a test. The framework's own standard is that orders are tested at transitions, and this one had none. A great deal of the argument amounts to observing that a very young order behaved like a very young order.

The Iranian comparison is a pair, not a controlled experiment. Two cases, selected because they contrast, differing on a dozen variables of which this study ranks four.

The claim that sincerity is the manufacturing process remains unverifiable, as it does everywhere in this project. We have no access to the mental states of the people who built Twelver Shi'ism over a millennium, and the categories "sincere" and "instrumental" may not map onto their world at all.

And a specific caution about the architect-phase thesis. The argument that all foundings look like this and that surviving orders merely deleted their files is elegant, and it is close to unfalsifiable in the form usually stated, because the absence of evidence is treated as confirmation. The Sassanid control is what saves it, and one control is thin. What would strengthen it is a systematic search for architect-phase documents across foundings — the Asturian chroniclers manufacturing a Visigothic pedigree, the court historians of other founders — coded before the outcomes are consulted.

Finally, a caution about the study's own framing. Reading a genocidal organisation as an instructive case in state formation risks aestheticising it, and the register of this paper — procurement decisions, formation curves, load-bearing members — is exactly the register in which that aestheticisation happens. Part XIV exists because that risk is real and is not answered by good intentions.

Part XIV — The excluded, and the discipline

What the architect phase was, for the people inside it.

This project requires every study to name the people who were inside an order's coercive reach and outside its settlement. Here the requirement is not a methodological formality and cannot be discharged in a paragraph.

The Yazidis. In August 2014 the organisation attacked the Sinjar region and carried out what United Nations investigators subsequently determined to be a genocide: men and older boys killed, thousands of women and girls abducted and held in a systematic and administratively organised regime of sexual slavery, with markets, price lists, transfer records and religious rulings issued to regulate it. Boys were taken from their families and trained as fighters. Thousands remain unaccounted for. This was not an excess of the conquest; it was policy, documented in the organisation's own publications, and it is the single fact about this case that any structural account must be built around rather than beside.

The Shia, the Christians, the Shabak, the Turkmen and the Kaka'i, whose communities in northern Iraq had existed for centuries or millennia and in several cases no longer do. And the **Sunni Muslims** who were the largest single category of victim, because an organisation of this kind spends most of its violence on the population it claims to represent — which is what the defectors reported and what the framework predicts of a conduct-sensitive claim under pressure.

The people the informant networks were built for. Part IX reads the sequence of Haji Bakr's plans as an elegant diagnostic of the formation deficit. What that apparatus was, for the people living under it, was neighbours recruited to report on families, on what was said at a wedding, on who prayed where — followed by arrests, by public executions staged and filmed for distribution, and by a court system whose punishments were the punishments.

The recruits. The audit described in Part VII was conducted by people, many of them very young, who had crossed borders on the strength of a claim and discovered what they had joined. Some of them died. Some were executed for trying to leave. And the study should be clear that reading their disillusionment as data does not make it anything other than what it was.

And the wider dead. The campaign that ended the territory killed very large numbers of civilians in Mosul and Raqqa, in cities the organisation had chosen to defend from among a population it would not release. The framework's language of floors and coalitions covers, in that phrase, the destruction of two cities.

On the vocabulary. This study has called human beings a *formed population*, a *floor*, *recruits* and a *load-bearing member*, and has described an informant network as a diagnostic instrument. That register is chosen because vagueness about mechanism has protected more atrocity than it has prevented, and because an organisation like this one is easier to mythologise than to describe. But the register makes suffering sound like a variable, and the debt must be paid in plain words: the women sold in Mosul were not evidence about formation curves, and the men in the ditches at Speicher were not a floor being advertised.

And one thing more, which is why the discipline is stated at this length here. There is a particular danger in this case that does not attach to the Sassanids, which is that an analysis of *why the project failed as state-building* can be read as an analysis of how it might have succeeded. This study should not be read that way and its conclusions do not support it: the finding is that what the organisation attempted was **structurally unavailable to it**, that the property it needed cannot be manufactured by anyone who needs it, and that no amount of better planning would have supplied it.

Legibility is not pardon. To explain the machinery of a genocidal organisation is to say something about the machinery and nothing whatever in its defence.

Conclusion

The folder, the clause, and what the pair shows.

Every durable hierarchy was once a construction site: a floor poured by violence, a word fitted over it from the materials at hand, and a tension between the two trades installed at the foundation. We almost never see that phase, because the orders that survive it commission, as their last deliverable, the story that there was no design — and three formed generations later, the inheritors sincerely cannot imagine the edifice was ever scaffolding.

This one died with the scaffolding up. A former colonel of a secular police state, holding territory taken by force, sat down and drafted the organisational charts of a state: informant networks first, then the land, then the courts and the appointed sheikhs, the word fitted over the floor like roofing. He was solving the problem this project exists to study, and he was solving it consciously, in his own handwriting.

He got most of it right. He made the correct procurement decision — retrofit the belief already on site rather than mint one, because the slow ingredient is a formed population and formation needs a childhood. He built the horizontal function that actually worked: a single source of title, courts, registers, a *hisba*, marriages into influential families, an administration that governed a territory the size of a small country. He understood that the public face had to be clerical and that a sharia court staffed by colonels convinces nobody.

And he failed at the one point no security professional can reach, and the framework says he could not have done otherwise.

He could appoint sheikhs. He could not appoint the standing they would have needed, because a qualification conferred by the men it certifies is the men certifying themselves with an extra signature. He could produce a claimant with a Qurayshi genealogy — and he had to, because no colonel can become Qurayshi, which is the whole reason the clause is there. But the caliphal office has a second requirement that his design could not touch, and it is the framework's own prohibition written into Islamic constitutional law: **a caliphate cannot be declared without the consensus of the community.** He attempted to forge the one kind of claim whose defining property is that it cannot be self-conferred, and within ninety days a hundred and twenty-six scholars had publicly refused to supply what the office requires.

Then his own army audited him. **The word had recruited it** — no paymaster buys what a word recruits for free — and the men it recruited were pre-selected for the single faculty that had delivered them, which was the ability to see the gap between a word and the conduct of the men administering it. They brought the faculty inside and turned it on their new leaders, and the exit interviews say what the framework predicts they would say: not that they had stopped believing, but that these men were **not it**. The audit failed does not produce an ex-believer. It produces a transfer.

And that is the finding the pair delivers.

Iran's clerical class had a qualification no shah could issue — made by peer reputation and voluntary lay following, funded by dues that passed directly from believers to scholars with no state in the circuit, seated in another country — and it had four and a half centuries of accumulated authorlessness behind it before anybody thought to capture it. It has been drawing that stock down for two generations: a qualification lowered in 1989 to fit the available man, an office passed to a son in 2026 under pressure from the armed force it built. **Term one is intact and term two is failing, and the order is still standing because there was a great deal in the account.**

The Islamic State ran the identical failure with nothing in the account at all. Same region, same century, same tradition, same conduct-sensitive claim, same manufactured verdict from the tradition's own scholars — and no stock, no formed cohort, no elapsed time, and therefore no buffer between the fidelity failures and the consequences. It paid cash for everything from the first day and the bill arrived in five years.

Which is the sentence to carry out of it, and it holds for Kartir's fire temples and the colonel's folder alike:

> ***The architects build the room, and formation makes it furniture — but only if the room is built out of something the architects did not make. What cannot be borrowed cannot be built, and what is built in front of witnesses is worth exactly what the builders can enforce.***

A note on sources and scholarship

Every borrowed idea is explained in the text rather than invoked on authority; this note gives the references and the reservations.

On the framework. Possession and ownership, the anchor and its properties, the bystander mechanism, exaptation and the sincerity finding, the interpreter's two functions, credential distance, the floor as a nested settlement and the guard theorem, the hostile-witness test and the fidelity variable are developed across this project's theoretical papers — principally *What Force Cannot Do*, which consolidates them, together with *The Shape of the Sieve*, *The Distance to the Sword*, *The Guard That Cannot Be Turned* and *The Belief That Cannot Be Manufactured*. The underlying scholarship restated in the compressed framework is James D. Fearon on commitment problems (*International Organization*, 1995), Barry R. Weingast on coordination and shared standards (*American Political Science Review*, 1997), Michael Suk-Young Chwe on ritual and common knowledge (*Rational Ritual*, 2001), and Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth Vrba on exaptation (*Paleobiology*, 1982).

On the two essays this study re-reads. *The Architect Phase* and *The Audit of the Faithful*, both in this project, were written before the anchor framework existed. The architect/inheritor distinction as modes rather than generations, the violence-first sequence, the procurement law, the tension installed at the foundation, the three-hundred-year thought experiment and the Sassanid control are theirs; the word-recruits-the-army finding, the account of the radical as produced by disillusionment at asymmetry, and the audit constraint are theirs. This study supplies the anchor apparatus, the credential-distance reading, the Qurayshi and consensus analysis, the fidelity split, the guard-theorem inversion, the surveillance-sequence diagnostic and the Iran pairing. Where the earlier readings are revised, the revision is stated in the text and the essays are left standing as written.

On Haji Bakr and the captured documents. Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khlifawi, known as Haji Bakr, a colonel in the intelligence service of Saddam Hussein's air defence force, killed at Tell Rifaat in northern Syria in January 2014; the recovery of his papers and their publication by Christoph Reuter in *Der Spiegel* in April 2015 as "The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State"; the character of the documents as handwritten organisational charts, informant networks, infiltration schedules and studies of local tribal power structures; and the presence around him of a

stratum of ex-officers of the dissolved Iraqi army and intelligence services networked in American detention, follow that reporting and the subsequent secondary literature. The reservations in Part XIII apply: this is journalistic reconstruction from a single recovered folder, its representativeness is unestablished, and aspects of the reporting have been contested.

On the caliphal claim and its rejection. The declaration of a caliphate at the end of June 2014 and the Mosul sermon of 4 July; the requirement of Qurayshi descent in the mainstream Sunni juristic tradition and its assertion for the claimant; and the Open Letter of 19 September 2014, signed by 126 Muslim scholars including figures from Al-Azhar and the International Union of Muslim Scholars, running to seventeen pages and twenty-four points and arguing almost entirely from Quran, prophetic tradition and classical jurisprudence — including the point that a caliphate may not be declared without the consensus of the Muslims — follow the letter itself and the analytical literature on it, including Ella Landau-Tasseron's study for MEMRI (2015). The critical literature on the letter's theological unevenness and limited public effect, and the observation that it did not spark wide debate in the Muslim world, are noted in Part VI and are drawn from that same literature.

On the defectors. The study of fifty-eight publicly documented defectors published in 2015 by Peter Neumann and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, and its findings that defectors cited the brutality and corruption of the leadership, the fighting of fellow Sunni Muslims, the harshness of life under the organisation and the charge that it was un-Islamic — and that some left laterally toward rival groups rather than exiting the cause — follow that report and the contemporaneous press coverage of it. The self-selection problem is stated in Part XIII.

On the territorial collapse. The recapture of Mosul and Raqqa in 2017 and the fall of the last enclave at Baghuz in March 2019 follow the standard record.

On the atrocities. The determination that the treatment of the Yazidis constituted genocide, and the documentation of the systematic enslavement regime, follow the reports of the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the subsequent investigative and judicial record.

On the Sassanid control. The rock inscriptions of Kartir, the third-century priest who served four kings and narrated his construction of the Zoroastrian state church in the first person, and the sixth-century Letter of Tansar, a court production dressed as a third-century document retelling the founding as a restoration and declaring church and state born of one womb, follow the standard scholarship on Sassanid religious and political history. Kartir's inscriptions are difficult and contested in detail, and the dating

and provenance of the Letter of Tansar are debated; the argument uses their general shape rather than any disputed particular.

On the comparative material. Timur's Chinggisid marriage; the Abbasid caliphate under the Seljuks and its destruction after raising an army; Akbar's *maḥẓar* of 1579; Henry VIII's Supreme Headship and its demotion; Ibn Tumart's *tamyiz*; the Norman settlement at Melfi; the Umayyad caliphal claim at Córdoba in 929; the *kipande* of colonial Kenya; and the Iranian material — the *marja' al-taqlid* and the *khums* system, the 1989 removal of the *marja'* requirement from Article 109, and the succession of March 2026 — are treated at length with their own sourcing in this project's other studies, to which the reader is referred.

On what is not attempted. This study makes no claim to original historical research in Islamic history or law, in Iraqi or Syrian history, or in Sassanid studies, all of which it enters as a visitor. Its contribution is analytical: to read a founding whose construction documents survive through a framework built afterwards; to identify the specific property a manufactured ground cannot have; and to pair the case with Iran in order to isolate what a stock of accumulated authorlessness actually buys an order that captures one.